

**Kathmandu** -- The U.S. government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID/Nepal), has provided \$350,000 to reduce the incidence and impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Banke, Bardiya, Dang, Dailekh, Kailali and Surkhet districts of mid-western Nepal.

GBV is an acute human rights challenge in many conflict affected areas of Nepal. The 11-year conflict severely exacerbated the unequal power relationships between men and women, increasing women's vulnerability to numerous forms of exploitation including rape, domestic violence, verbal and psychological abuse, and physical and sexual torture. Damage to traditional social and economic networks, loss of male heads of household, forced displacement, and reduced access to health and educational facilities dramatically diminished women's abilities to safeguard their wellbeing and that of their families.

"USAID assistance will help increase awareness of gender-based violence and ensure that those affected, including widows, receive critical psychosocial counseling, medical treatment, education and skills training and job placement services to reduce further risk," said Beth S. Paige, Mission Director of USAID Nepal. "This project will also employ a proven strategy of engaging men and male religious leaders in reducing GBV. Advocacy undertaken by men in support of women's interest is one of the most effective means of fostering attitudinal change across communities."

This 12-month long program is being implemented through The Asia Foundation and its local NGO partners.